

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY  
 BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH TED KOPPEL ON ABC-TV PROGRAM, "NIGHTLINE"  
 PENTAGON  
 JULY 29, 1994

will start landing in the Rwandan capital of Kigali. There could soon be a thousand troops in that war-ravaged country. It is a bold move, coming just four months after the withdrawal from the debacle in Somalia.

We begin this broadcast with an interview I conducted late this afternoon with Secretary of Defense William Perry, who is leaving in the morning for Kigali and the camps in Zaire.

SECRETARY PERRY: There are more than a million refugees at Goma, and we're trying to provide the infrastructure and support and the food and the medicine, fresh water for a city larger than the size of San Diego. And all of that, all of those supplies are going through one small, poorly equipped airport at Goma now. So we do believe -- we've concluded we have to increase the capacity before we can get all of the supplies in that are needed. So we're going to be opening a hub, airlift hub at Kigali.

Kigali's about a hundred miles by car, by truck, from Kigali to Goma. Therefore, by opening that airport, we will be able to greatly increase the flow of relief supplies to where they're needed, at Goma.

KOPPEL: Now, the short-term needs, obviously, are to get as much food, medicine, water as you can into Goma, which is where the refugees are. But as I understand it, the next step will be to encourage a large number of those refugees to return to Rwanda, to the region of Kigali.

Is that the plan?

SECRETARY PERRY: Besides the million refugees at Goma, there are perhaps several other million refugees in different places in Zaire, different locations in Zaire, and of course in Southern Rwanda. And part of the problem is keeping those people from dying, providing their immediate needs. A larger problem is motivating them to return, making safe conditions where they can return to their homes and to their farms so they can take care of their crops. Otherwise we're setting up a larger problem months from now because of the absence of the tending to the crops.

KOPPEL: In a sense, then, the die is

TED KOPPEL: Today President Clinton said the United States must do more and he authorized a greatly expanded American role in Rwanda. Tomorrow American planes and troops

cast. You're going to have Americans in the capital of Rwanda, a large relief operation there. And while I understand that the intent of this is purely humanitarian, once you have encouraged tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of Rwandans to return, there is the potential for a nasty situation. I mean, if war should break out again, you're going to have a lot of Americans, potentially, right in the middle of it.

SECRETARY PERRY: We will have at the Kigali airport enough Americans to man the airlift hub there. That's all they will be doing in Kigali. That'll be several hundred people initially. Their job is to get the food, the relief supplies, the medicine transshipped to the places where it's needed, is Goma. That's the function there.

The Rwanda government has invited these refugees to come back into their homes, their farms. The oversight of that operation, the protection of the safety of those people, is a function of the U.N. operation, the peacekeeping operation in Rwanda. That's not part of our mission. Our mission is the humanitarian mission.

KOPPEL: I understand. And I'm not criticizing the mission in any fashion, Dr. Perry. What I'm suggesting is that sometimes things go wrong. And once you induce several hundred thousand people to come back, all of a sudden there is a responsibility, if fighting should break out again, if killing should break out again.

You referred to the U.N. force. What U.N. force. What U.N. force? How many U.N. troops are in place in Rwanda now?

SECRETARY PERRY: There are two different aspects to the U.N. force. There is the French force, which is located in Southern Rwanda. That has well over a thousand troops. And then there's an attempt to form something called UNOMIR, which is going to be formed primarily from African nations. That's still in the process of being formed at this stage.

KOPPEL: I promise I'm only going to hit you on this one more time. But if things begin to happen along the road from Goma to Kigali, if people start being killed, if for some reason the Tutsi begin to extract revenge for

what was, after all, the killing of more than half a million of their own people within the past few months, you're telling me U.S. troops would not become involved in trying to put a stop to that.

SECRETARY PERRY: That is correct.

KOPPEL: So all we're there for is to provide the food, to provide the medicine and to try and distribute it. And if the war breaks out again, what do we do, leave?

SECRETARY PERRY: No. Let me be -- that's exactly correct. But also let me say that we are important members of the United Nations. We have a lot of influence on the decisions and actions taken by the United Nations, and we would certainly support and pressure the United Nations to take appropriate action if that were to take place.

KOPPEL: Dr. Perry, you've got a long trip ahead of you. Godspeed and thank you for coming in.

SECRETARY PERRY: Thank you, Ted. Nice to talk to you.

KOPPEL: Nice to talk to you, sir.